

After Amazon worker dies at Troutdale, Oregon warehouse, management ordered employees to work around the body

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Amazon workers: Tell us what conditions are like at your facility. All submissions will be kept anonymous.

A worker died at Amazon's PDX9 fulfillment center in Troutdale, Oregon, on Monday, April 6. For more than an hour after his collapse, employees at the facility say that management ordered them to continue working around his body. The death went unreported for a week before the online investigative outlet, the Western Edge, broke the story on April 13.

The worker, 46 years old, was employed as a "tote runner," which involves gathering stacks of yellow plastic bins, loading them onto a cart and hauling them along warehouse corridors for other workers to fill. According to multiple employees who spoke to the Western Edge on condition of anonymity, the facility recently reduced the number of tote runners, increasing the physical burden on those who remain.

The unidentified man collapsed on the second level of the loading dock. A 911 call placed at 1:55 p.m. captured a worker describing what he found: the man had extensive blood coming from his head and was "very blue looking." A second caller asked the dispatcher for instruction on how to operate a defibrillator.

A worker identified as Sam, whose name was changed by the Western Edge to protect her from retribution, has CPR training and asked her supervisor for permission to assist a woman who was already performing chest compressions. The supervisor refused. "It has to be management or a safety team," Sam was told. "Please get back to work." Sam pressed further. The supervisor reportedly replied, "Just turn around and not look. Let's get back to work."

Workers at PDX9 were not allowed to go home until the end of the 3:45 p.m. shift, with management claiming they would be paid in full for the entire day. The night

shift was also canceled, with employees supposedly compensated, but Sam reported that Amazon has yet to honor that.

One worker on social media corroborated the story. "This is my site. This was a tote runner that worked FHD [who] was an older gentleman who suffered cardiac arrest likely from heat and over exertion. Fell down, hit his head. Was given CPR on site [and] by the time the ambulance came he had already passed. Our hearts and prayers go out to this person's family. It's been truly sad around the facility."

Workers also commented on Amazon's internal messaging app, one noting that, "Amazon was given a 16 billion dollar tax cut to invest in AI and robotics so they can cut 600,000 jobs. Do you think Amazon cares about safety?"

Amazon has contested the claims, with Amazon spokesperson Kelly Nantel asserting that the company focused on "ensuring our employee received the care he needed." The company has leaned heavily on an initial Oregon OSHA report, which determined the death was not work-related.

This is not the first time OSHA has covered for the logistics corporation and its centibillionaire founder, Jeff Bezos. In the summer of 2022, three workers, Rafael Mota Frias, Rodger Boland and Eric Vadinsky, died at Amazon warehouses in New Jersey during a heat wave. Coworkers reported that management at the Carteret facility told workers to work through the heat during Amazon's high-paced Prime Day.

In that case, OSHA also sided with Amazon, claiming that the deaths were not work-related. In addition, Amazon threatened to fire workers who contradicted the official account. And in the aftermath of the Carteret deaths, Amazon upgraded the air conditioning system at

the warehouse, a tacit admission that the deaths were in fact workplace-related.

In the aftermath of the Troutdale death, others on social media also commented on the horrible conditions at their own Amazon facilities. “Dude died at my warehouse,” one wrote. “They put the giant cardboard trash things around him. Warehouse didn’t miss a beat. L4s said some one sentence word salad the next day. ‘Do it for him,’ that guy he didn’t know the name of.”

And another added: “I honestly thought this was the one at my location because this incident happened last week, that last Friday. I don’t work Friday’s but I came back to the building the following week on Monday and everyone was asking if I had heard what happened to which I told them, no, obviously, what was going on.

“They proceeded to tell me an older lady was on the second floor and whether she just fell and hit her head on the way down or something fell on her, nobody knows, but she ended up sadly passing away from the accident.”

In December 2021, management at a fulfillment center in Edwardsville, Illinois, ignored days of advance tornado warnings from the National Weather Service and kept workers on the job overnight. The storm caused the building to collapse, killing six workers. Less than two months ago, on March 10, Amazon locked delivery drivers out of an Oklahoma City warehouse during an active tornado warning, with a manager directing workers outside as sirens blared. Only the storm’s change of course prevented deaths.

In May 2023, Caes David Gruesbeck died of blunt force trauma to the head while attempting to fix an overhead conveyor at an Amazon facility. The company was fined a pittance of \$7,000. And last year, at the JFK8 fulfillment center in Staten Island, New York, Leony Salcedo-Chevalier was struck and killed by a truck at the loading dock.

PDX9 has long been among the most dangerous of Amazon’s facilities. A 2019 investigation by the outlet Reveal found it had the highest injury rate of 23 major distribution centers examined. In 2018, more than a quarter of all workers at the site had sustained injuries on the job.

The trend continued during the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, when Amazon’s refusal to provide proper protective equipment caused at least 100 infections, making it the fourth-largest workplace outbreak in Oregon at the time. In August 2021, a second outbreak at PDX9 had infected 345 workers, the highest total of any workplace in Oregon, surpassing even

overwhelmed medical centers.

In both cases, Amazon forced workers to sign nondisclosure agreements to suppress information about the severity of infections from the public and from workers themselves.

The death at PDX9 also exposes the role of the Democratic Party in setting up America’s industrial slaughterhouse. The facility was built using \$9.6 million in tax breaks granted by the Port of Portland and the city of Troutdale in 2017, and total public subsidies extended to Amazon for its Oregon expansion reached \$213.1 million. At the time, Oregon Governor Kate Brown called the facility’s opening “a celebration.”

The deaths at Amazon are part of America’s industrial slaughterhouse. Last April, autoworker Ronald Adams Sr. was killed at the Stellantis Dundee Engine Plant when an overhead gantry crane activated without warning. A year later, MIOSHA has not released the results of its investigation, and the United Auto Workers (UAW) has worked alongside management to suppress the case.

Under the Trump administration, OSHA’s enforcement capacity is being gutted further. Proposed budgets slash inspection staffing, freeze new rule making, including a heat illness prevention standard that could have applied to facilities like PDX9 and replace enforcement with voluntary compliance by employers. Workers cannot rely on these agencies, which have never protected them.

The defense of workers’ lives at Amazon and every other workplace requires workers themselves to organize. The WSWS urges Amazon workers to build rank-and-file safety committees, genuinely democratic organizations of, by and for workers on the shop floor, to fight back against unsafe working conditions and to conduct their own investigations when workers are injured or killed.



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